

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TAGS: PFOR, SCUL, SY

SUBJECT: US-SYRIAN CULTURAL RELATIONS

REF: A. DAMASCUS 190; B. STATE 49812; C. STATE 56775; D. ATHENS 1731

1. ON MARCH 28 I WAS CALLED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO MEET WITH DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER DR. ZAKARIA ISMAIL IN ORDER TO DISCUSS SEVERAL IDEAS WHICH I HAD RECENTLY MENTIONED TO HIM IN AN INFORMAL, LOW-KEY MANNER CONCERNING VARIOUS CULTURAL MATTERS.

2. AT THE OUTSET DR. ISMAIL INDICATED THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IS SINCERELY INTERESTED IN AN IV PROGRAM FOR NEXT YEAR BUT THAT THE PRESENT TIME IS NOT "SUITABLE" TO PROCEED WITH SUCH A PROGRAM. HE CONTINUED THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IS ALSO "IN PRINCIPLE" INTERESTED IN HAVING A FULL-TIME AMERICAN PROFESSOR AT THE DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY BUT THERE AGAIN HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE TIME IS SUITABLE TO MAKE A DECISION IN THIS REGARD. HE ASKED ME, HOWEVER, WHETHER OR NOT THE MATTER MIGHT BE DISCUSSED IN JUNE, WHEN HE LAUGHINGLY SAID "WE MIGHT NEED MORE THAN ONE PROFESSOR." I POINTED OUT THAT MOST IF NOT ALL AMERICAN PROFESSORS ARE USUALLY
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COMMITTED IN THE SPRING FOR THE NEXT ACADEMIC YEAR

AND THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO FIND SOMEONE AVAILABLE IN JUNE. NONETHELESS, I TOLD HIM THAT I WOULD CONVEY HIS SUGGESTION TO THE DEPARTMENT.

3. DR. ISMAIL THEN INFORMED ME THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT SINCERELY APPRECIATES THE ASSISTANCE RENDERED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IN OBTAINING THE RETURN TO SYRIA OF THE STOLEN ROMAN MOSAIC (REFTEL C). HE ADDED THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS THIS AN "IMPORTANT" DEVELOPMENT AND HAS AUTHORIZED THAT NECESSARY PUBLICITY BE GIVEN TO THE EVENT. IN AN ASIDE HE THEN POINTEDLY NOTED THAT THIS PUBLICITY IS BEING AUTHORIZED DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE PRESENT PERIOD IS STILL NOT YET SUITABLE FOR SUCH MANIFESTATIONS OF US-SYRIAN RELATIONS.

4. FINALLY, DR. ISMAIL INDICATED THAT ONCE AGAIN BECAUSE OF THE TIMING, THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT REGRETS NOT BEING ABLE TO SCHEDULE DR. MIDDLETON, LECTURER ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS, FOR APRIL 6 OR 7 (REF D).

5. COMMENT: RUNNING THROUGH DR. ISMAIL'S COMMENTS WAS A RECURRING THEME THAT IT STILL IS TOO EARLY FOR THE UNITED STATES AND SYRIA TO EMBARK ON CLOSE CULTURAL RELATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, IT WAS QUITE OBVIOUS TO ME HE WAS MAKING THE POINT THAT ONCE DISENGAGEMENT IS ACHIEVED AND SYRIA GOES TO GENEVA, IT WILL BE MUCH EASIER FOR THE UNITED STATES AND SYRIA TO COOPERATE CLOSELY ON THESE MATTERS. HE EMPHASIZED SEVERAL TIMES SYRIA'S INTEREST IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATION WITH THE U.S. I AM NOT DISCOURAGED, THEREFORE, BY HIS REJECTION OF THE TWO IV GRANTS FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR OR BY THE REFUSAL TO SCHEDULE DR. MIDDLETON. I THINK WE HAVE SIGNALLED TO HIM AND THROUGH HIM TO THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT OUR READINESS TO BE FORTHCOMING AT SUCH TIME AS THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS IT TO BE APPROPRIATE AND IN ITS INTEREST. I BELIEVE THAT THIS IS THE MOST WE COULD HAVE EXPECTED AT THIS TIME. I STRONGLY RECOMMEND, THEREFORE, THAT WE PROCEED

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WITH FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FY 75 AS PRESENTED IN REFTTEL A. AT THE SAME TIME, I WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE KNOWING IF WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO RESPOND FAVORABLY IN JUNE SHOULD THE SYRIANS BE PREPARED AT THAT TIME TO CONSIDER THE ASSIGNMENT OF A FULL-TIME PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY.

SCOTES

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